



TEXAS GENERAL LAND OFFICE

JERRY PATTERSON, COMMISSIONER

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MEDIA ADVISORY

Veterans Day service to recognize daughter of fallen hero

Patterson: Re-folding of flag 'opportunity to honor a hero the right way'

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AUSTIN, Texas — An unfolding story of a heroic Texas veteran will be celebrated this Friday.

Texas Land Commissioner Jerry Patterson will assist in re-folding and re-presenting a U.S. flag to the daughter of a Vietnam war casualty. The flag belongs to the family of the Land Office's Budget and Planning Director Jennifer Henry. The flag covered her father's casket as his body was returned from Vietnam in 1969.

Henry discovered the flag amid family memorabilia in an effort to put the pieces together of her father's shrouded combat service for the Voices of Veterans oral history project at the General Land Office. But she noticed the flag was folded incorrectly – something Patterson and fellow Marines will rectify at the Land Office's Veterans Day service.

The Veterans Day service will take place 11 a.m. Friday, Nov. 7, in room 170 of the Stephen F. Austin State Office Building (1700 N. Congress Ave., Austin), just north of the Texas Capitol. Refreshments will be served in the building's cafeteria following the service.

"Jennifer has worked diligently to uncover the details of her father's service, and we're proud to have this opportunity to honor a hero the right way," Patterson said.

The program will begin with the presentation of the colors by the Marines of Weapons Company 1/23, followed by a presentation from Vice Commander of the Texas Veterans of Foreign Wars Dan West. Patterson will be the keynote speaker, followed by a Marine flag ceremony in which Henry's family's flag will be refolded into the traditional triangular shape featuring only a blue background and white stars.

Henry was just four-and-a-half years old when her father was killed during a mortar attack on Feb. 22, 1969, during the much-storied Dewey Canyon raid in Quang Tri Province. He was 33.

Much of the information of her father's combat service and role in Dewey Canyon was lost to time, until Henry consulted an online Vietnam Memorial Wall website, where she found comments made by those who knew her late father. During her research, she

found photographs, personal anecdotes of her father from his brothers-in-arms, and documentation to help her come up with a clearer picture. She shared the information with the Voices of Veterans oral history program (overseen by the Texas General Land Office) to share the story with others hoping to learn more about the Vietnam war, or to learn more about their own family's sacrifices for our nation.

Henry shared with Voices of Veterans that her father, Capt. George Meerdink, spent his first tour of duty (1965-66) as an aide-de-camp for Brigadier General Frederick J. Karch.

Under the conviction that he should be on the front lines, and after receiving specialized training in Amphibious Warfare at Quantico, Va., Meerdink was sent on a second tour to Vietnam in September 1968. He was assigned as the company commander of the 1st Battallion, 9th Marine Regiment, 3rd Marine Division. Meerdink's regiment was instrumental in Operation: Dewey Canyon, which was the last major offensive by the Marines during the Vietnam era. It involved a sweeping attack against North Vietnamese troops through a dense valley. Marine casualties totaled 130, with 932 wounded.

"Capt. Meerdink signed up for front line duty when he didn't have to," Patterson said. "That's a hero."

NOTE: a new Voices of Veterans website will roll out in time for Veterans Day, Nov. 11, making it easier for viewers to access and upload stories such as Meerdink's. The new site will have an updated, contemporary look and feel, and will have phone, tablet, and desktop versions. It will be accessible to a wide variety of older and newer Web browsers.

For interviews, or for more information on Friday's pre-Veterans Day event, please contact Texas General Land Office Press Specialist Andy Hogue at (512)463-9212. (Photos of Capt. Meerdink available upon request.)

WHAT: Re-folding of a U.S. flag belonging to the daughter of a fallen war hero

WHO: Commissioner Jerry Patterson and Jennifer Henry of the General Land Office

WHERE: Stephen F. Austin State Office Building, 1700 N. Congress Ave., Austin

WHEN: 11 a.m. Friday, Nov. 7

WHY: To honor all veterans whose stories deserve to be told

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